

# Does Mortality Priming Increase Religious Thinking?

## Evidence from Implicit Spatial-Religious Associations

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### Theoretical Background

Terror management theory posits that people with lower self-esteem defend their cultural worldviews when reminded of their mortality (Mortality Salience; MS). These people strengthen the values of their worldview when confronted with death.<sup>1</sup>

For religious beliefs, different effects have been found depending on the level of assessment: On an explicit level MS increases religious peoples religiosity while decreasing atheists religiosity. On an implicit level, MS increases religiosity not only for religious people but also for atheists.<sup>2</sup>

The implicit religiosity can be measured by using the vertical association of the deity.<sup>3</sup> Several cultures associate God and positive values with the upper space while the devil and negative values are associated with the lower space.

☞ Because the vertical association of the deity is part of the cultural worldview and MS increases cultural worldviews, a higher vertical association of the deity is expected under MS.

### Discussion

Mortality salience lead to higher associations of God with the upper space and the devil with the lower space. People with a high self-esteem did not show this effect.

☞ Increased implicit religiosity in order to manage one's terror induced by mortality.

### Procedure

Measurement of self-esteem

IAT measurement 1\*

Writing an essay with different topics:\*\*

- One's own death (Mortality Salience; N = 67)
- Tooth treatment (Control condition; N = 67)

Delay task (word search puzzle)

PANAS

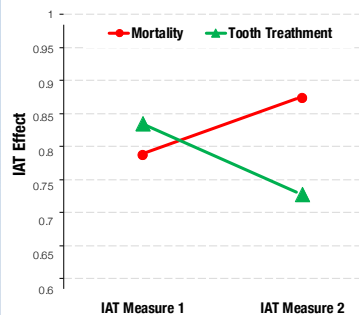
IAT measurement 2\*

\* The block order was counterbalanced: half of the participants first learned a congruent association (God-Up, Devil-Down), the other half first learned an incongruent association (God-Down, Devil-Up).

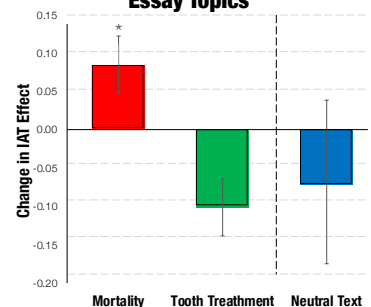
\*\* An additional control condition (N=17) copied a neutral text

### Results

#### Effect of Essay Topic on IAT Effect



#### Changes in IAT effect for different Essay Topics



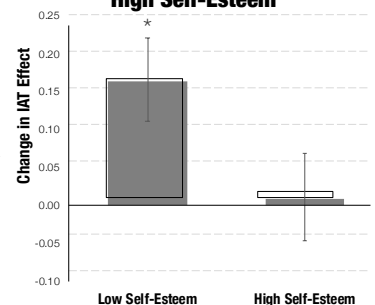
- Increase in IAT effect under Mortality Salience

- Decrease in IAT effect without Mortality Salience
- ☞ training effect

- Differences of IAT-scores under MS only for people with lower self-esteem

- No differences in PANAS due to Mortality Salience

#### Changes in IAT Effect for Low and High Self-Esteem



### References

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